

# Senate Votes, 84-12, To Condemn Mining Of Nicaraguan Ports

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## Administration Tries To Defend Its Position

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The Senate voted overwhelmingly yesterday to condemn U.S. participation in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, rejecting a last-minute effort by the Reagan administration to defend its position and its program of aid to rebels against the leftist government of Nicaragua.

The 84 to 12 vote, on a non-binding "sense-of-the-Congress" resolution that can have no direct effect on the program, was the first time the Republican-controlled Senate has gone on record in opposition to any aspect of President Reagan's policy in Central America.

"If it is not binding, I can live with it," Reagan said last night at a state dinner for President Salvador Jorge Blanco of the Dominican Republic. "I think there is a great hysteria raised about this whole thing. We are not going to war."

Earlier, a large number of senators from both parties gave a hostile reception to administration officials who came to Capitol Hill to explain the policy. And Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) sent a strongly worded letter of complaint about the mining to CIA Director William J. Casey.

Goldwater, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a stalwart administration backer, said in the letter that the mining, which has reportedly damaged eight ships from five nations, is "an act of war . . . I don't see how we are going to explain it." A copy of the letter was obtained by The Washington Post.

The Senate vote put that body on record against the use of U.S. funds to "plan, direct, execute or support the mining of the territorial waters of Nicaragua." Sen. Russell B. Long (D-La.) was the only Democrat among the 12 dissenters.

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THE WASHINGTON POST

# Senate Condemns Mining Nicaraguan Ports

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Republicans who voted against the administration included Majority Leader Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, Minority Whip Ted Stevens of Alaska and Sen. Paul Laxalt of Nevada, a firm friend of Reagan's.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), who sponsored the resolution as an amendment to the administration's tax bill, said afterward that the vote showed "the deep concern all Americans feel about the escalation in Central America and Nicaragua, and the real possibility of American boys dying in the jungles of Central America." Although this is the first expression of such sentiment by the Senate, he said, "There will be more."

Kennedy sponsored a series of unsuccessful efforts last week to eliminate the administration's request for \$21 million to aid the rebels opposing the Nicaragua government and to cut its emergency request for \$62 million in military help for the government of El Salvador.

The appropriations measure carrying both provisions passed the Senate virtually unscathed, but House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) said yesterday that it will not pass the House before its Easter recess begins Friday.

Administration sources, who have insisted the aid is needed right away in El Salvador to keep that country's army from running out of supplies, said a decision would be made today on whether to use emergency funding authority to provide the money or to ask the House and Senate appropriations subcommittees to provide it by reprogramming money allocated to other nations. "We can't wait any longer," one source said.

The administration tried throughout the day to respond to a frenetic week of news and leaked

reports about U.S. actions and plans in Central America, and to concerns from members of Congress that they had not been kept informed.

The White House issued an unusual three-page statement from Secretary of State George P. Shultz, Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, CIA Director William J. Casey and the president's assistant for national security affairs, Robert C. McFarlane.

"We state emphatically that we have not considered, nor have we developed plans to use U.S. military forces to invade Nicaragua or any other Central American country," the statement said.

Citing "longstanding obligations under the Rio Treaty, our treaty obligations to defend the Panama Canal or military contingency plans for disaster relief, humanitarian assistance or emergency evacuations," the statement acknowledged that "For over a generation, as prudence would dictate, we have maintained and updated plans for these contingencies. We have not, however, planned to use our forces to invade any country in the region."

The New York Times reported Sunday that "contingency plans are being drawn for the possible use of U.S. combat troops in Central America" if leftist forces cannot be defeated by current strategy. In another article yesterday The Times said the new contingency plans are political ones and that military plans have not yet been fully drawn up. The word "invasion" was not used.

The White House statement also denied plans for "a post-election military enterprise in Central America," apparently referring to a Washington Post article yesterday that reported that a senior administration official had said Reagan "is determined to go all out to gain the upper hand" over

leftists in Central America after the November election, assuming that Reagan is returned to office. The mining is viewed as "a holding action" until that time, the story said.

The statement also insisted that "all U.S. activities in the Central American region have been fully briefed in detail to the committees of the Congress which exercise jurisdiction in full compliance with the law."

Goldwater's letter to Casey disputed that. "It gets down to one, little, simple phrase: I am pissed off!" he wrote. "Bill, this is no way to run a railroad . . . The president has asked us to back his foreign policy. Bill, how can we back his foreign policy when we don't know what the hell he is doing?"

Goldwater's letter predicted that the House will defeat the measure containing funds for the Nicaraguan rebels, known as "contras," "and we will not be in any position to put up much of an argument after we were not given the information we were entitled to receive . . . when you briefed us on Central America just a couple of weeks ago."

Goldwater continued, "I don't like this. I don't like it one bit from the president or from you." He promised that "in the future, if anything like this happens, I'm going to raise one hell of a lot of fuss about it in public."

Meanwhile, White House spokesman Larry Speakes said Reagan had been surprised at heavy press coverage of a speech last Friday in which he criticized Congress for undercutting his foreign policy in Lebanon and Central America and called upon its members for bipartisan support.

"The president was surprised that that harsh interpretation was put on the speech," Speakes said. He called the coverage "disproportionate to [Reagan's] intentions." The White House had billed the speech a week in advance as a major foreign policy address that would be a benchmark for election year debate.

Yesterday the administration dispatched Undersecretary of State Kenneth Dam and Casey to brief senators on the situation in Nicaragua.

Sen. Jim Sasser (D-Tenn.) told reporters on emerging from the session that many senators expressed anger that they had not been told in advance that the mines were to be laid. But Casey "took the position he had advised the [Senate Intelligence] Committee" about the mining in "a sentence" of the briefing to which Goldwater referred, Sasser said.

Sasser and several other senators indicated that they were unmoved by that argument. "I want the mining stopped forthwith," Sasser said. He added that Casey had indicated there had been "a lot of turmoil within the administration" over the issue, *See LATIM, page C11*

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## Administration Scrambles to Defend Its Position

**LATIN, From A16**

but said there was "no indication from Casey that they are going to change the policy."

Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) said after the briefing that he had known about the mining "as a result of my own specific questions in a briefing outside the committee" and "assumed everybody knew about it."

He called the program "absolutely stupid. It will prove at best a harassment to the Nicaraguans and can only diminish the position of the United States in the rest of the world."

Earlier, former president Jimmy Carter agreed.

"I think it's a disgraceful thing for our country to do," he said at a news conference before a speech at Roanoke College in Salem, Va. The White House decision to remove U.S. actions in Central America from the jurisdiction of the World Court, Carter said, is "an unprecedented approach to international law and quite damaging to our country's reputation among nations."

Kennedy had introduced a com-

panion resolution expressing congressional sentiment that the withdrawal from World Court jurisdiction should be reversed, but he dropped it from the tax bill amendment as part of an agreement with Senate leadership in order to obtain a vote on the mining resolution, Republican sources said.

Under the agreement, which the sources said was approved by the White House, Republicans were told that the vote was not a test of party loyalty.

There were no floor speeches, but afterward Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), one of the 12 who backed the administration, said that the people laying the mines, whoever they are, "are working for the best interests of the Nicaraguan people and of all the people of the region. Whatever role, if any, may have been played by U.S. officials should not blind us to the fundamental truth that what we should do is applaud."

House Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.) said, "The Sandinistas [governing Nicaragua] are the ones who have been throwing beanballs. Let's not blame their targets,

and let's not send our friends to the plate without a helmet."

Lynn Bouchey, head of a conservative group called the Council on Inter-American Affairs, promised that members of Congress would hear from their constituents in support of administration policy during their Easter break and might yet approve aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.

"If they feel the heat, they may see the light," he said. "I don't think the administration is by any means ready to throw in the towel."

The administration statement affirmed the policy, calling the Sandinistas "a government fanatically dedicated to intervention beyond its borders" and "the source of regional subversion and insurgency."

The statement said it is "critical that the American people understand what is at stake" in Central America. It said U.S. policy has consistently supported the Contadora peace process originated by Mexico, Venezuela, Panama and Colombia, but "Nicaragua's response throughout has been fraudulent and cynical."

Senior administration officials

agreed yesterday that there is little leeway in existing law that might allow them to fund the Nicaraguan rebels other than through congressional appropriations.

The compromise legislation last year that provided \$24 million, which is expected to run out in June, was carefully drafted to exclude that possibility.

The administration's statement again asked support for the administration's request for \$62 million in emergency aid to El Salvador, saying "recent uninformed comment on these matters has diverted attention from the central issue . . . the ongoing Salvadoran election process about to enter a runoff requires our support so that El Salvador can ensure its safe conduct."

There is considerably more support in the House for this program than for aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, which was rejected twice last year.

But O'Neill said that "there is no question" he has the votes to cut that request in half.

Staff writer Fred Hiatt contributed to this report.

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